THE SPACE GAMER
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Requested

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3RD CLASS

the SPACE GAMER

number 1 70 cents

AN OPEN LETTER TO SCIENCE FICTION FANS

This is the introductory issue of METAGAMING CONCEPTS own magazine. THE SPACE GAMER will be devoted entirely to supporting and improving science fiction gaming, a not unexpected goal for the only company devoted solely to the hobby. We think science fiction games are going to be a big part of the science fiction experience in a few short years and we'll be a part of making it happen. THE SPACE GAMER will serve as a communications forum for gamers and a prod. A forum for the phenomenon of science fiction in game form and a prod for excellence and growth. You have our pledge that everything in our means to support and improve the hobby for gamers will be done. We ask your support in helping us do it.
So, join us for the exciting early years of a new hobby; it's going to be fun.

Howard Thompson

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Editor
THE SPACE GAMER

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THE SPACE GAMER is published quarterly by Metagaming Concepts. A six issue subscription is $3, increasing to $4 for six after January 1, 1976. Address correspondence to: TSG, Box 15346, Austin TX 78761.
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Printed in U.S.A.

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Editor: Howard Thompson
Contributors this issue:
Thomas Galloway
Brett Tondreau

WHY WE DO IT!

If you've ever been called upon to defend your enjoyment of science fiction or s-f games to your perplexed friends you've had to answer this question. For sure not everyone is expected to like the same thing but if you have a hobby or pastime not shared by a large plurality of Americans you'll be made to feel a bit wierd. Our society is pretty big on herd instinct. Peer pressure, conformity call it what you will the thrust of equality as currently defined militates against being other than from the same mold. Its somehow anti-democratic, anti-social, dangerous or just plain rude. Its as if the only path to freedom, justice, utopia and the like is for us to bo all the same. As if sameness somehow saves us from the dreaded charge that our system is less than perfect. Hence wargamer's and s-f fans assume the tinge of abnormality because they number a percentage too small to show up as statistically significant in a Gallup poll.

My s-f/gaming interests used to embarass me with others. Condescending pity is about the most you get from the herd. You miss out by not being in there with the guys, or girls, and having a different hobby hurts the acceptance quotient. Being given to thinking is almost enough without an interest in 'fantasy' and games. My chagrin changed as all things must with time. Armchair sports freaks, pub crawlers, mystery, gothic, western, history, 'pop' psych, political, religious, food, drug, true confession's, music, etc, etc, etc, freaks who, however casually snide, cut s-f or games now risks a massive scathing of inmost bigotries.

On the level of escapism, s-f and games are no better or worse than any hobby. Its what you get from them that counts. Its just that few of us do s-f in comparison with the hordes that watch As The World Turns. Aside from escapism 'play' is gaing ground in psychology as a concept of value learning theory, creativity, and intelligence measure. 'Play' is at the base of all adult productive and creative activity. Games are an extension of infantile mechanisms by which children adapt to and accomodate the world. The mental activity associated with playing a game like STELLAR CONQUEST gives all those intuitive/deductive problem solving mechanisms a comprehensive work out. Research shows that the process of learning and problem solving actually alters brain chemistry in favor of increased reasoning/memory ability. You don't play the game to stretch your smarts, you do it for the fun or challenge. But, the by product of that fun is an extensive tuneup of your cognitive capacity.

It shouldn't come as a suprise that you learn best and think best when deriving pleasure from an activity. In school its the exception rather than the rule that coursework gives most problems when the class is painful bore.

Playing games has a valuable effect carrying over into our daily lives, which is more than you can say for 20 hours of TV football. The value of the science fiction experience is not as amenable to measureable evaluation. An interest in s-f is part of a whole process of future orientation. We all try to cope with, control, and plan for the future but the s-f fan makes it a concentrated hobby. We are preoccupied with the future as an almost reality that has a pervasive impact on our whole way of living. With our western society evolving at such a rapid rate Future Shock isn't just a catchy word. S-F fans expect to inhabit some portion of the futures they escape into in fantasy. I'm not aware of any scientific study on it but I'd bet s-f fans suffer less, all else being equal, from disorientation to societal evolution than others. S-F fans are used to adjusting mentally to altered environments, they enjoy it. This future obsession wasn't too valuable in the dark ages but it is in a time when experts are out of date in their specialty in a decade or so.

Gaming and science fiction do have real value for our work-a-day lives. A pastime/escapism is what you make of it but ours have good potentials. Many are not doubt saying uh uh to these broad statements so let's tie up some loose ends. All of us know some gamers or s-f fans so far gone into the escapism experience that whatever value potential the hobby has never gets transalated into reality. For them the experience is a barrier to a world they can't cope with on equal terms. Other escapisms have their long term internees also which shouldn't necessarily lead to condemnation for a whole hobby. Everything can be abused which is an attribute of its use rather than its inherent value. At least when they come out of it the future/cognitive value is still theirs to to use which is more than can be said for some activities.

My personal bias about gaming and s-f is that I do get a lot of enjoyment from it. The people you meet are an intelligent, appreciable lot. Its value to me or mankind is up to me and rests on nothing else. If I'm a failure that's my hang-up, not the fault of my hobbies. Its not popular to emphasize individual importance just now, but then thats an understandable symptom of a society that frowns on everything in a minority, a minority that isn't currently chic anyhow. Which brings us back to where we started making a good place to quit til next time. HT

WHERE WE'RE GOING

Since no one had ever heard of us til our ads started appearing last fall its fair to ask what to expect from us. Our only business is science fiction games, we won't diffuse our efforts on anything else. Our hobby is fairly new and growing so rapidly we can't even reach all the potential customers. THE SPACE GAMER will provide a communications forum for fans that can support the hobby. It also gives us a place to tell our own story, which we badly need in the face of the flood of mail from STELLAR CONQUEST. THE SPACE GAMER gives us a chance to tell everyone what's going on withour having to say it ten times over. The magazine had been planned for after our third or fourth game but circumstances demand we do it now. Not that we regret it, we just wish our crystal ball was a bit more clear.

In trying to decide what sort of material is suitable for TSG who would read it weighed evenly with what had to be accomplished. A sizeable minority of our readers will be relatively new to s-f gaming and gaming in general. The rest will have a background in historical conflict simulations and have little trouble adapting to s-f themes. While its good to have a broad audience it means the disparities in gaming experience make it difficult to present material in such a fashion as to appeal to both ends of the spectrum. The new gamers will need more basic articles with lots of background. Experienced gamers will want to take their knowledge for granted and go right to the esoteric presentations. Since one goal of TSG is to promote the hobby of s-f gaming we're very much concerned with novice gamers. Growth will come from them but as their knowledge increases they'll want more complexities. For reasons of complexity

With the introductory issue we are trying a policy of bringing you s-f games from other publishers at a discount. If the policy works you'll see more titles next issue. The discount is only for TSG subscribers and only possible if we sell enough to continue quantity buys.

STAR PROBE from Tactical Studies Rules. This is a massive game that eventually will have 3 rules books, the first is available now. The game is played on a 2000 star map. Players explore and exploit star systems in incredible detail of alien races, dangers, and resources. Players will seldom contact each other though it is provided for. Victory is measured by best exploration results. You get a fantastic amount of variety and detail, don't pass if you dig s-f exploration. $5.10 for TSG subscribers, $6 for all others.

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS also from TSR. This is a 'swords n' sorcery' game with three rules booklets, "Men & Magic", "Monsters & Treasure" and "The Underworld & Wilderness Adventure". The game is played in a mythical ruined castle with dungeons, treasure, monsters and such. Each player/charactermoves about the ruins trying to stay alive and score points in combat or with 'find'. The game needs a referee but it's really taking hold as an almost second life of some s-f fans. $8.50 for TSG subscribers, $10 for all others.

Order now, these are professionally done and <u>well</u> worth it.

STELLAR CONQUEST wasn't the best introductory game. Many with no experience made the quantum jump with no trouble but for others it was like trying to read sanskrit with only two hours instruction. Experienced gamers tend to their learning difficulties, but, just remember the problems you had if you didn't have someone else to explain what is now obvious.

So we'll be speaking to two pretty different groups. With your support and our sweat TSG can blen the worlds of science fiction and conflict games into an enjoyable whole. But it means each half of our audience will sometimes be left with not quite what he wants. Its going to be almost unavoidable and we ask your patience. Just remember that while you're having trouble with a particular article you won't be alone and many others will be finding it exactly what they needed. We hope you get out of TSG what we like to read in other publications. If each issue can give you a little humor, something to ponder, something to try and the urge to speak your piece we'll be doing our job.

The first few issues of TSG will be on a quarterly basis as you see it now. The next issues will get bigger as our familiarity with doing a publication grows and as we get contributions. What happens after that depends on response, ie. how many subscribers we get. Going at least bimonthly with significanly more pages per issue is the goal. Graphics, layout, and production will get better as circulation grows. Most of our subscriptions will come from word-of-mouth and from those who but our games so you can help by showing us around. There will be some advertising and promotion but mostly we'll grow from our readers. We'll do the best we can at what we like. If you like it too TSG will be an instrumental force in helping s-f gaming grow into a viable part of the science fiction experience. If you <u>don't</u> like what we're doing let us know. We are interested in what you have to say so please send us back the questionaire enclosed, it'll help us know exactly how we're doing. A similar brief survey will be in each issue so we can have a running score.

Since most of our time is devoted to the games you want and necessary mundane business matters the bulk of what will be printed will be contributions from readers. Some editorial effort will go into what you say but you can expect to see it printed if if you have an idea and can string simple sentences together logically. The staff will condentrate on games, our news, and s-f gaming news in general. Everything else will eventually come from you so speak up. Most likely others will be interested in what you have to say and respond to it. A small compensation will be paid for the best contributions as determined by reader voting but it may be an issue or two before that is ironed out. That means that if there are sufficient contributions for a meaningful vote next issue the best non-staff article will get $10 and the second best $5 with all others getting some free issues added to their subscription. Not much admitted but it is something in addition to the joy of seeing yourself in print.

In talking about ourselves its also fair to mention who you are. So far more have responded from our s-f ads than any other. Almost 10% are women, about 20 times more than wargaming in general, and we'll follow their experience with particular interest. Nearly a fifth are in the military, 10% from Canada, and a fair chunk from rural addresses. We won't know much more than that unless we undertake a big marketing type survey which we don't have the time for. You share our joy with s-f and games and maybe that's as much as any of us need to know.

Looking ahead its not too early to mention our new game for the fall. Don't send money now, price hasn't been set yet and TSG subscribers will get a price break on it and all games we do from now on. THE YTHRI, based on material in The People of the Wind by special arrangement with Poul Anderson, will be announced next issue with details for ordering. This game had the cover name PLANETHEAD ASSUALT until the game rights to the book had been finalized. So, stay tuned for the Terran Empire's combat assualt on Avalon, home of the biracial Ythri, human culture. And rember, subscribers only will be eligible for that price break. We feel those into s-f gaming enough to support a specialty magazine like THE SPACE GAMER deserve some recognition for their support of the hobby. The least we can do is give them a break in the checkbook which is usually their main constraint on enjoying the hobby.

Another thing to look foward to is a game design contest. It will be limited to science fiction/fantasy games with the winning game to be published by us in addition to a prize. Since we aren't assuming we're the only people who can design at least a few unknown talents will be found for sure. In the long run METAGAMING will develop a number of outside designers to produce most of the games we publish. The contest should be announced next issue so get to work on those ideas you've never committed to paper. Game designing is fun even if you don't have another block buster like Monopoly.

Another break in the pocket book that's being tried this issue is advertised on page four. If enough are interested we'll carry other games by other publishers such as STARPROBE and DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS. They are different in style from anything we'd design yet professionally done. Games offered by other publishers will be bought in quantity which qualifies us for an additional 15% discount on the wholesale price. The 15% discount will be passed on to our subscribers with all others paying regular price. This can be done only if enough are interested to warrant the bulk order. The normal retail discount is 40% which we will still realize on the sale and which will go toward our operating costs and helping us promote s-f gaming. Frankly, its not worth handling other games unless they sell in fair quantity so if you like what you see order from us and save a buck. The questionaire asks about other games you might like at a discount so let us know what you want, if anything.

Much of what we do will be controled by economics. But since time is all you need to have a good game money won't affect game quality as opposed to packaging quality. If you didn't notice that was the transition to the 'bad' news. Our sales of SC were only about half what we had expected. This was due to the (shudder) recession, our advertising inexperience, and the fact that we were new comers to an area notorious for spotty quality. Hind sight tells us we didn't do badly at all. It does mean our game production runs won't be as large for the next few games. Since unit cost goes up drastically in quantities less than SC's run it means the next few games won't have that wonderful plastic map and full die-cutting for the counters won't come until game three or four. The only other step back will be to omit typesetting of rules and other printed matter but that will be offset by going to booklet type rules. That's the bad news. Games won't be as expensively produced as SC was. We will be improving graphics and illustrations. For example we have permission to use Jack Gaughan's award winning illustrations for Jack Vance's The Dragon Masters with our insect cultures game. We felt strongly about the plastic map as a step up in quality from the

usual paper maps so prices for the next few games may run a bit lower than SC. SC has to go to $9 after September 1 to allow for distribution with stores and a professional game cover. Other games will go from $6 to $8 depending. So the 'bad' news turns out to be more of a mixed bag. The main thing you will lose, in terms of cost to us, is the plastic map and typeset rules. Subscribers will get a bit of a price break and still have a soundly designed game.

The game after THE YTHRI will be the one letters tell us we shouldn't do but its really been fun doing so we'll go ahead anyway. Its tentatively titled HYMENOPTRIA and will use the Jack Gaughan illustrations just mentioned. The brief blurb in flyers drew comments like, "sounds wierd", and " the other two sound interesting". But, we like it and feel some urge to be innovative. Based on play testing it looks like a real sleeper in terms of fun and playability. It will be a society level game for six players with the basic assumption being that the culture is biology oriented rather than machine oriented as ours. We aren't really satisfied with the name so if anyone has an idea with oomph send it in. You'll get a copy of the game and an extra years worth of TSG. Names are crucial to a game's success and a better one will probably mean the difference between ho hum sales and popularity regardless of design quality.

Many TSG articles will give a lot of background and introductory material on gaming in general for our relatively new gamers. Flack will come from both sides on this. Newer gamers will say too many buzz words are being used and too much being taken for granted. They are right from their viewpoint and utterly right that getting into gaming is rough on the novice. We'll always be guily of forgetting the novice and we're sorry. There's no help for it despite how hard we may try. Experienced gamers just forget how much trouble it was to grasp the concept of what the games are all about. Newer gamers are invited to submit articles despite their relative lack of experience. Only the gamers just begining to get it all sorted out can fully bridge the gap to the raw novice and make consistently meaningful comments about learning problems. Old timers are more likely to tell the novice to keep plugging and it'll all come clear. It will come clear if you keep plugging but many who would really get a bang out of games get discouraged to the point of disgust by the initial dificulties. TSG will make every effort to develop material for learners and make the acquisition of a new hobby as enjoyable as possible. We can't make you into instant champs but hopefully we can help explain why you got wiped out so easy.

Articles about basics will hit older gamers as of no use. They will be right and wrong in condemnation all at the same time. Despite experience most old timers aren't as good as they think they are. (Yeh guys, we really said it.) Only a minority of gamers play close competition under controlled circumstances such as exist in chess clubs with player ratings and tournements. The best players will be in clubs strong enough to have contests and such which includes only a handful of existing gamers. Most games are really fiddled with by most gamers rather than really played. Few players ever become really confident with the rules of even a few of the flood of historical games. And, few of those historical games are balanced enough to deserve the effort of mastery. In short, most 'old timers' can benefit from going back to the basics unless they are among the lucky members of a club.

By now most old gamers with insurmountable ego problems have stopped reading and thrown us aside so we can be even bolder. How many old timers can do much

more than wipe up novices on their favorite, oft played games? Their victory is more a product of knowing a game than anything else. Not to say they can't play well, they just haven't had that much real competition. For most games played in this country today winning is a product of experience on a game more than anything else. Ok, ok, it is exagerating but how much truth is there in it that is usually glossed over. Most gamers really into it are more likely to regard themselves as budding designers rather than as premier gamers. More comments about the game's design pass from during play than about position or strategy. They are playing the game as an exercise in design critique instead of for the fun or competition. This is perfectly understandable when you realize that the heroes of the historical game world are the game designers and game publishers instead of game players.

Designers rather than game players. It does make you stop and think a bit. Some gamers shell out a hundred or more a year and have no chance of recognition. Is their's but to do and buy? Hopefully that will change and we hope to do our little bit to help.

This column will be a regular one with each issue. It will be devoted to TSG and METAGAMING CONCEPTS happenings. The rest of the magazine is open to our readers.

Shaan Striker, genetic mutation from Hymenoptria, J. Gaughan

STRAIGHT FROM YOU

Dear Sirs,

You are brilliant! I have received STELLAR CONQUEST and am simply overjoyed.

I like the game format. It is laid out to be realistic and enjoyable. I am particularly impressed by how you've managed to work in so many different aspects of science and s-f. Having tried to make s-f games myself I can appreciate the difficulty of performing such a feat with the skill you have displayed.

The game is a thinking man's pastime. Very few such games are in existence, though I feel they are needed. I hope you make more of this sort. Please keep me informed.

In regard to your note to players, I would like to say you know s-f readers well. Perhaps this is the reason behind the quality of the game. Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,
James Krause
Franklin, Wis.

Dear Howard,

Thanks for the votes. Just remember that you can change them anytime. I personally gave SC a 9.5. I agree it has flaws, but it is so far ahead of any other games I've seen (except my own, of course!), it's not funny. That's why it gets the 9.5. If another couple games come along that are better---down she'll go.

Thomas Galloway

(Thomas Galloway designs a few games of his own, SPACE HUK in particular, and maintains a s-f games rating system mentioned else where this issue.)

Dear Howard,

I'm sending along a copy of Ash-Wing for your perusal. I should warn you that the upcoming issue is the first of a series in which I valiantly strive to stop at twenty pages. We did play the game one night at the infamous Tankcon, held annually over Christmas. It's a small invitational con, about 5 or 6 guys. One gamer amongst the bunch and he spent one whole evening reading the rules. Then next evening he explained in simple layman's language what went on and away we went. Enjoyed it, too, I must admit, although none of the rest of us were gamers and I doubt if I'd ordinarily spend that many hours at a game except at something like this, when time meant absolutely nothing. Anyway there will be a review in this next issue of A-W.

Later,
Frank Denton

(Frank has an excellent publication of his own and graciously agreed to do a review.)

Dear Howard,

I am terribly sorry at being so slow in writing to thank you for sending me your game of STELLAR CONQUEST. I am very impressed with the lucid way in which you have handled the many facets of exploration, combat, technology, and production. Although I haven't had a chance to play yet, your beautifully organized rules give me a very clear picture of the way a game would develop (a faculty I have picked up in studying game rules for some forty years). Although my personal preference is towards more abstract games that play in a maximum of some two hours, that in no way detracts from the excellence of STELLAR CONQUEST for those who like a complex simulation that is handled with great clarity.

Sincerely,
Sid Sackson

(Even if we'd never sold a single copy praise from Mr. Sackson is something we'll always remember.)

Dear Sirs,

I and my friends have enjoyed your game STELLAR CONQUEST immensely. It is far and away the most intelligent and sophisticated game I have ever played. Congratulations on an excellent and well thought out idea.

The Player Record Sheets you include with the game have proved invaluable for bookeeping. So invaluable that we find it difficult to play the game now that we have used them all up. Accordingly, I have enclosed $10 for as many sheets as the check will cover.

Thank you very much,
Richard Johnston

(For those others who are also running out you can copy them if you wish or order 20 for $1 printed on both sides in a more convenient 8 1/2 by 11 size.)

(This ends our letters this time. We do thank the hundred or so others who wrote about SC also. There will be more variety next time. All we had so far was SC for comment. We did get a small amount of flack on the game but less than a percent wanted a refund, not bad for a new firm that displayed the refund policy prominently.)

WANTADS

Our wantad section is open to subscribers at a rate of 50¢ for a twenty five word ad. Clubs can have a free ad if they offer some verification of membership and existence. Conventions or other special publicity can get a mention in the news section. Since this is our first issue we've only got one.

KELLY MOORMAN, 601 Roselawn, Monroe LA 71201 wants to work up some play by mail games of SC and will be willing to act as moderator.

S-F GAMING NEWS/PLUGS

Flying Buffalo Acquires Supernova

As of issue #25 Supernova, formerly a s-f zine published by Lewis Pulsipher, will be published by The Flying Buffalo Inc., Box 1467 Scottsdale, AZ 85252. Richard Loomis will serve as editor with a five issue subscription going for $2. TFB is primarily a publisher of computer moderated games played by mail which has begun to branch out into other areas. Lewis had been looking for a home for his Zine which concentrated on s-f games, Diplomacy variants, and fantasy games. His educational plans require him to spend a year in Europe in the near future. In a cooperative arrangement between TFB and Metagaming Supernova subscribers will get introductory copies of THE SPACE GAMER along with buyers of STELLAR CONQUEST. Hopefully competition through cooperation will help the whole hobby and encourage improved quality.

ALIEN SPACE FROM ZOCCHI

Lou Zocchi, 1513 Newton Dr., Biloxi, MS 39532, publishes a tactical non-board space ship game called Alien Space for $4.50. He also has a catalog of many other simulation games in print, mostly wargames but some s-f.

STARLORD from Flying Buffalo

Starlord is a tactical/strategic game where victory goes to the player who does a good job of producing for civilian consumption. Record Keeping accounts for movement and all other information with each of four players having his own clear plastic 'board' and grease pencil. A more detailed review of the game will appear next issue. $5 from Flying Buffalo, address above.

Phantom Star Reports

Tony Watson, 201 Minnesota St., Las Vegas, NV 89107, publishes this zine for 30¢ per issue for non-game players. It is devoted to his play-by-mail game Phantom Star Raiders which is a simple ship-ship tactical game.

STAR PROBE Available

Star Probe is a game of "adventure, conflict, and exploration is space" from Tactical Studies Rules, one of the more competent small game publishers. The game will eventually have three seperate rules booklets, each with as much material as SC rules, with the first one available now. The game is BIG with 2,000 stars portrayed on the simple black and white map. The rules available so far can give a complete game. Each player starts as something like a head of a deep space exploration having to select and outfit and crew his own ship. The game has incredible detail of resources, alien races and the like sufficient to satisfy any s-f fans predilections for space exploration. More time will be spent on this game in later issues. It is available for $6 from TSR, 542 Sage St., Lake Geneva WI 53147 or from Lou Zocchi. In fact we like the game so much we are offering it at a discount as shown in our ad on page 4. Color us envy green.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Available

This is a 'sword n' sorcery' game where luck and verve play a bigger role than direct competition. It's getting pretty popular and we'd like to carry a review of it by someone 'into' fantasy. We'll offer this at a discount also but won't profess to fully understand it since fantasy isn't our bag. The game is intended for play with miniatures but can be played without them. Just think of it as a game doorway to an experiential event and you'll get the right picture. Review anyone?

GALAXY II/STARBASE 2300

Brett A. Tondreau, 5536 Kester Ave, Van Nuys CA 91411, gamemasters two computer moderated pbm games. Rules for Galaxy II are $1 including a large glossary of terms. A normal move is $1 with non-active turns are less. The game is big and detailed and shouldn't be attempted by a novice. Starbase 2300 is a simpler version of the other at 60¢ per turn that has only become recently available. The note below was provided by Brett who retains all rights of reproduction.

Galaxy II is a computer moderated s-f space wargame written in the latter half of 1974. It is a game played by using a computer to act as an objective moderator. Fifteen to thirty players participate by mail in turns taking place about every five weeks. A great deal of latitude is permitted the players. He is permitted to differentiate his 'Race's' characteristics, its leaders, its associations, its peacefulness or aggressiveness, and anything else he feels is indicitive of his situation in the game. Each player assumes the identity of an alien racial leader. His advanced culture is described and given a starting star position an a galactic map consisting of 90-100 stars and 4,000 spatial coordinates. The map and resources of all stars, planets, and asteroids is computer generated. The player initially decides which of three basic types he wishes his race to be, a member of the federation, a nomadic freebooter, or barbarian. A good deal of the game can be devoted to obtain-diplomatic ties with the other members of your group or other players. The elimination of the other two groups gives all members of the surviving group a partial victory. Probes provide the player with information about mineral content, defenses and offensive weapons, group and attack status, number and type of ships, and types of planetary bodies when they enter a star system. Each player is in a position of omniscience over his domain and receives detailed reports each turn describing the status of his planets and ships. Players name all ships and colonies describing in great details moves and orders for each. For example, a player may specify that planet Achilles is to build Matter-Antimatter drives of installation in his latest vessel Kondorn and that offensive beams, defensive shields, probes, probe screens, power and life support are to be installed in the ship. Players can order investment in individual colonies levels of mineral or industrial' technological efficiency. Turn sheets can get quite long and complex as players colonize more and more planets, probe more stars, and launch more ships. A player who thirty colonized planets and fifty space ships could conceivably make 225,000 seperate decisions in the course of one turn. After those decisions he must also consider his crucial diplomatic correspondence. Galaxy II was designed to be a game of complex, subtle relationships and would have never have been conceived if the massive information processing capacity of the computer had not been available.

STARGUARD Available

McEwan Miniatures, 380 D St., Salt Lake City UT 84103, offers a "tactical infantry combat in the year 2250" game that says you'll like it if you liked Starship Troopers, Falkenburg's 42nd or Dorsaii. That's a lot even if it does only part of it. Rules are $3.50 and there are about 40 different types of miniature figurines that can be bought seperately. We'd appreciate comments or a review from those who've played it.

TRIPLANETARY Available

Game Designer's Workshop, 203 North St. Normal IL 61761, offers Triplanetary, a tactical maneuver game of single space ships on a hex grid board. The vector movement system gives a lot of emphasis to ship control and accounts for most of the actual play decisions. We will have more on this one later and invite fan comments or a review. If there is enough interest we'll offer this one at a discount also.

ORIGINS I convention

The Avalon Hill Co is sponsoring a national wargames convention. Info: TAHC 4517 Hartford Rd., Balto. MD 21214. Those in the area can find out all they want about historical wargaming on this one. Avalon Hill was the company that started the whole hobby in the fifities.

A HUGO FOR GAMES?

The 1980 convention has been a landmark success in the phenomonon known as science fiction. A friendly awards banquet crowd applauds the bestowing of a new Hugo for the best science fiction game of the year. In a brief span of half a decade the hobby of a handful of hardy amateurs has become a viable, stimulating pastime for a sizeable minority of fans. Science fiction has officially recognized games as well as print and film. The future oriented s-f experience becomes progressively more vibrant as it assumes a multi-dimensional way of life.

The small band of s-f gamers who already enjoy space gaming can only hope that a Hugo is in the future. To most fans it's but whimsy. While s-f dreams commonly stay in dreamland it's not an entirely improbable future scenario. Til recently s-f gamers numbered in the hundreds, a far cry from the hundreds of thousands who buy bestselling s-f paperbacks. A Hugo for best swahili novel of the year would have seemed more likely. But, there's always a chance and that chance looks fantastically better now than ever before.

The first commercially successful s-f theme game, Starforce, has been published by the mail order wargames champ, Simulation Publications, and has been a best seller of theirs for a number months. This is a considerable event when their clientele consists of historical wargame buffs who gobble up 18 or more new wargame titles a year from SPI. Avalon Hill, established marketer of boxed wargames, is rumoured to be coming out with a game version of Robert Heinleins's Starship Troopers which should make a real splash with s-f fans. When the two 'biggies' of wargaming get into the act with s-f games and make money it means s-f gaming will get the wide distribution and promotion necessary to build a base of customers. Even if fans get turned off by the 'conflict' nature of these games the attention they attract will insure a several years long surge of new s-f gaming titles.

Just as with s-f literature or film it is the commercial operations that will make or break the hobby. So far s-f gaming is an out growth of historical wargaming. The Two firms mentioned above account for 95% of that market and no doubt view their dabbling in s-f games as an extension of their wargames. The effort is worth it because Starforce made money and s-f magazines are a sustaining media for advertising. Starforce, and no doubt Starship Troopers when it appears, are basically wargames with a science fictional thematic environment. Games are competitive in nature and for these two firms the games are expected to have a novelty appeal to their existing historical wargame customers. A game with appeal for history/war buffs that also attracts s-f fans could potentially outsell a popular wargame. There will be exceptions to the heavy conflict content. SPI is planning to publish a game to be called Sorcerer that could have a heavy fantasy content. Most recent news for the game indicates it will have a strong comb ative theme but sufficient fantasy may find its way in to save it with fantasy fans.

How these initial games sell and satisfaction of s-f fans with them will largely determine what happens after that. They will attract a lot of attemtion and the first ones are and should continue to sell well. If the designers miss the mark in giving s-f fans a lot of fun and the novelty value wears off for historical wargamers then the 'mini' boom in s-f games will fold in a year or two. So, the prospects for a game Hugo look real right now. If the major firms make money from s-f games in the next few years then the s-f experience will be permanently expanded. If money is lost then the prospect fades and gaming will be confinded to historical wargamers and a modest number of s-f game hobbyists.

Of crucial importance in all this is the intentions of the big firms. Their present bread and butter profits come from historical wargamers. Starforce compels Avalon Hill to come out with an s-f game to be competitive. The choice of a Heinlein novel for a basis is a happy one. But, chances are that both firms will tend to view s-f games as a method of attracting s-f fans to their wargames rather than as a part of science fiction. Such a viewpoint isn't ideal for s-f fans but it makes a reasonable lot of sense for the wargame firms. By any estimate the potential number of s-f gamers will never be but a fraction of the 40-60,000 active wargamers. The s-f market is not large enough by itself to support a game to the extent the big firms need. As long as their wargame customers buy so many different wargame titles it makes more sense to tie up capital in wargame design rather than s-f game design. S-F games are only attractive for them when they also appeal to wargamers. What it adds up to is that the big firms most likely won't treat s-f gamers as a seperate market. For them s-f games will be just a different theme of wargame.

Where do miniscule efforts like ours fit in the picture? So far as we know we are the only firm to publicly commit itself to s-f games as our sole activity. If science fiction games become an identifiable sub-genre of s-f no one will be happier than us. Our effort and goal is games with s-f themes that are playable and enjoyable not just because they are somewhat like historical wargames. Almost by definition games are competitive and in that sense ours will be like wargames. However, a successful s-f gaming hobby will have a flavor and style all its own. What is great for historical wargames, in terms of hobby enjoyment, isn't necessarily going to turn-on s-f fans. Our approach is part and parcel of the 'experimental' nature of the first few issues of TSG. S-F gaming will find its own style and enjoyment and when it does it will most likely be more akin to science fiction fandom than wargaming. THE SPACE GAMER will be looking for that style and serve as a communication forum for it.

"Hard" science fiction will be the starting point for our games because that's where our interests and skills lie. Fantasy games will come as designers with interestes in that area come to the fore. We hope our efforts have at least a small part in a Hugo for games. A Hugo will happen if game firms give enjoyment to s-f fans and the hobby grows in its own way as a relation of science fiction. Our contribution can continue with the level of response we've already experienced. Even if the big companies s-f games 'mini' boom of the next few years flops we'll still be around. So, stay tuned for a blow-by-blow account of a game Hugos chances. It seems possible now and should be predictable in a year or two.

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SCIENCE FICTION GAME SURVEY

Anyone trying to get a feel for a new hobby needs a yard stick to measure what he finds. A rating of s-f games will give those with nothing else to go on at least a general feel for how others react to specific games. Since preferences always vary you should always gather your own information and form an individual opinion. Its the only sure way of being satisfied.

The ratings we publish here are maintained by Thomas Galloway, an amateur s-f game designer of some repute. The rating includes the games name, game time in length of hours to play, game time in turns to play, complexity index, physical quality of play components, and an overall rating of how much the game was liked as a whole. It should be noted that too few ratings have been received so far for the scores to be statistically significant. We have dropped those games that had too few responses to to have any meaning at all. Thomas is the designer of Space Huk and others.

Survey results as of May 3, 1975

Game Name	Game Turns	Game Hours	Complexity Rating	Physical Quality	Overall Rating
Gorgamella	29	---	6.35	7.35	8.71
Dungeons & Dragons	31*	6*	7.83	8.11	8.56
Space Huk (2nd)	24	---	7.33	7.50	8.50
Stellar Conquest	29	6.5	7.26	7.58	8.30
4000 AD	28	2.8	3.75	9.25	8.20
Triplanetary	15	4.5	5.77	8.27	7.70
Lensman	35	9.4	7.98	6.86	7.61
Helm's Deep	14	2.8	5.20	7.90	7.54
Assassin	18	2.2	5.29	6.33	7.14
Starforce	18	4.2	6.25	8.00	6.96
Chainmail	20*	15*	7.25	6.86	6.86
Space Huk (1st)	15	---	6.07	5.58	6.76
Derch-Ach	11	.8	4.67	6.00	6.67
Empire I	31	6	5.58	6.83	4.83
Moonbase	14	---	5.00	5.00	4.75
2nd Galactic War	15	3.3	4.40	6.75	4.30
Wayland Madness	13	.9	3.00	6.00	4.00
Rigellian Wars	40	4.1	3.10	3.13	3.50

*Those items marked with asterisks indicate that the game rules or type of game does not lend itself well to set play times or that play limits are inappropriate. Most of the omitted answers apply to play-by-mail games where game hours is meaningless. The last three columns are based on a rating scale of from zero, lowest, to ten, highest rating. There are another thirty or so s-f games known to exist, mostly smaller amateur efforts. We will try to bring you information on most of those of any worth in later issues.

We ask all to send in ratings for these games. In analyzing the results above we find several things that make no sense to us which is further proof that too few gamers have sent in ratings for the results to be more than very vaguely meaningful. The bottom three games will never have ratings higher than the top three but you can't say much more than that right now, so get cracking and send in your vote. Only in this fashion can you get the yard stick needed for games.

Thomas is in the process of winding up his formal education so his address is up in the air for the near future. Send your ratings to Thomas Galloway, c/o The Space Gamer Box 15346, Austin, TX 78761 and we'll see that they are included in the next ratings. Be sure to include your name. This protects the survey from exploitation and allows you to change your vote later if your experience with the game changes your opinion.

We ask your advice and comments on these ratings. They should be expanded to include a few more variables, we think, and other things may need revising. At this time the ratings are the property and effort of Thomas's but he'll need help with it in the future as the number of responses grows. We'll be providing that help.

Don't underestimate the effect of ratings. They are the surest way gamers have of letting publishers know what they want, aside from buying a product and then finding out it wasn't what you'd been led to expect. If a game stinks give it that rating. If its good don't be niggardly in rating it high marks. This survey is your 'carrot and stick' over the hobby so use it and see what you want being published as a result.

A DIVERSION

The sun and its attendent planets, one a cloud flecked blue-green, swam imperceptably through the dark. Tiny motes of metal glint here and there as the only evidence of sentient purpose. Suddenly, near the fertile world's smaller second moon a new swarm of those glinting motes began to jump into existence. The swarm broke into several thrusts and began a swift advance inward down the gravity well toward the smaller motes waiting in orbit. Energy screens shimmered and sparked as opening showers of intelligent missles closed on target. The larger, more numerous vessels of aggression pressed in, as if high losses were less important than potential advantage realized. Some of their number vanished to the missles and more to the ravening damage of energy pattern bases on the inner moon. The smaller fleet came to meet rather than wait and be crushed in the narrowed mobility of near planet high gravity. Only the movement of ships and shimmer of defense screens gave knowledge that this was a clash of death rather than celestial ballet.

Quickly, quickly the scarred battlecruisers of attack drew closer, until the range of their projectors could shower destruction on surface bases. The blocking fleet gave way in rapidly diminishing numbers, their frail ability no match for the larger strike force. The Kledge Combine seemed victorious in cunning suprise. A key defensive position and prime world about to fall and with it a carefully built position of strength, so crucial was its value and unexpected its assualt. The Kledge had paid a price in scarce support craft, but its all valuable heavy strike squadron was still intact. Repairs would be needed but their loss was less than would have been willingly given to win this battle.

A thousand mile diameter area on the southern continent had been cleared of major operable defenses. Surface assualt carriers began discharging air fighters into the upper reaches of atmosphere with coverage from frigates and escort class supports. Powered Infantry transports internally were tense readiness as drop capsules waited for release. The Combine was working swiftly and well with its last reserve of experienced forces in a classic, rapid surface assualt. It would be a badly needed victory and that victory was perceptibly theirs as the first PI capsules began disgorging veterans on planets surface.

Perceptible, but not actual, as a gambled trap closed. As yet unused ground defenses opened fire on the waves of assualt capsules. A newer flicker of motes leapt to existence near the inner moon, already at combat acceleration. And, on that moon itself the projectors recently believed wasted shot out new beams of raw molecular energy. The Unity had used its painfully accrued advantage to lay, and spring, a trap for the nucleus of effective opposition. Without that hope giving nucleus the Kledge Combine lost whatever chances time and luck might bring their way in the near future. The Unity's hegemony would be complete with only mopping up in the months ahead. The pinned force tried vainly to flee the conflict intact to fight another day but the reversal was too complete, the trap too deep and strong. The last most of the Combine ships saw was the previously damaged Warp Fort, Xenophon, bearing slowly down, spraying space/time distortion in every direction. Only scattered, shattered remnants left the system pell-mell into the void for unchartered regions beyond the Unity's interest. The Kledge cast of the die had failed in a brilliant snare and all was lost.

Eldon Tannish slumped at his terminal, totally drained. That last assualt almost got him as his depleted Resource Indices

mutely attested on his printout. But, Eldon's coldly spliced logic and angered flair for vicious counter attack had tumbled a most dangerous opposing alliance. Review analysis undoubtedly would reveal weakness in his play but his game would also would also add to his rising repute as one of the youngest likely Masters in years. Pressure play was his most rapidly improving asset as a growing number of losers could attest.

The control cubicle clock showed the last confrontation sequence had used up almost the full eight hour game allotment. Thankfully his opponents had resigned their hopeless position rather than play out the last, exhausting minutes. Games ended before time only by unanimous consent and Eldon had been well willing to let them have a slightly higher ending score than they could have maintained for the full eight hours. No need to build blood enemies for future games and his position, while dominant, did have weaknesses that might be stumbled on by accident. Unlikely, but impossible with a consent ending. Better to accept a most satisfying victory now with no extra-game problems to haunt him later in the tournement.

It was only Eldon's second annual NORCON meet as a ranked player and still early going so he needed to save for later. He rose from his seat and moved outside the soundproof chamber in a studied calm. Game time was for gaming and practice for practice but the more durable Masters knew to wash it from the mind for reasonable intervals or face insanity. Eldon was still learning and learning well what it would take to play the game into his middle years. He loved the intense experience of competitive play and would do everything in his power to retain status ranking as long as possible. And, all consuming insanity was one of the quickest ways out. Not that insanity was cause for loss of ranking but an untended neurosis was an inevitable prelude to diminished judgemental capacity. The Game wasn't like the old chess where an unstable genius, and there had been many, could win almost as an outgrowth of possessed concentration. The Game was a multi-player event and an unstable player couldn't long handle the requirements of diplomacy and compromise under pressure. A mentally uncontrolled player was an unreliable ally and positive danger to himself, best eliminated as soon as possible. Early eliminations rapidly destroyed a player's ranking in a 'what have you done lately' ranking scheme.

A trickle of other gamers were moving from their game cubicles, their games also having ended early. Eldon moved to the exit of the gaming area and turned to wait for Alba. She had been one of the six others in the game with Eldon and one of his major antagonists, this time anyway, in the alliance had nearly broken him at the end. More women like Alba were joining and competing strongly in the Game and Alba was one of the better ranked novices. More women in the games was giving them a different flavor. But, the game was always evolving which some of the old gamers seemed to ignore.

"Good game," Eldon greeted.

"You'd think so anyway," retorted Alba as she approached. "If those other idiots hadn't wanted to quit I'd have cut your margin lots in the Phoenix Prime sector. You weren't nearly as strong as they thought."

"That's what the results will show anyway, Alba, " Eldon replied turning to walk with her. "It wasn't easy to figure but I was stretched thin. Of course, an accomplished gamer will get the most from the position," he added with a gleam.

"Insufferable male pig," snorted Alba turning on her heel.

Eldon pleasurably watched her retreating backside. Women in gaming were a problem in terms of their variant styles, but their style, as with men's, had inherent disadvantages if you knew how to use it. Sometimes Alba got him and he stuck it back whenever

he could to maintain any personal advantage possible.

Eldon moved slowly down the broad hall outside the cubicles area toward the players lounge. The huge public arena hadn't started to empty yet and he could just beat a rush of twenty thousand spectators. As Eldon entered he noted the huge central display had begun recaps of early finished games. He selected a private lounger with a good view to see how he'd come out. Sipping a cool SynthaHI he noted with satisfaction a 31% score for the game he'd won. An unusually high score when starting position, strength of opponents, and probable finish all counted. The game had only seven players, one more than minimum, giving him maximum opportunity to exercise his loner's style. Odds were most against him in ten to twelve player brawls where compromise and diplomacy were an over shadowing must. Alba had gotten excellent coordination/ cohesion scores for her seminal role in leading the group that nearly got him. His victory this time would make it harder to be the loner so completely when facing any of the losers again. Since the expected score in a seven player game was a little over 14% his 31% was sure to up his average significantly.

"Good game," greeted Basil Samiv. "Best you hold back a bit or your going to be a mark for the Masters. Those guys will go out of their way to burn a hotshot."

"We humble ranked novices just do our best and take blind luck when we get it," Eldon returned. "I'll have a hard enough time with the computer giving me situations I'm weakest in as it is. I bet I won't get less than a nine player game for the rest of the tournement."

"Hope so," said Samiv amiably, "we like to see prodigies lump it, helps my aging novice ego." Samiv had never moved up from Ranked Novice class, it was true, but he was capable of playing two levels above himself in occasional flashes of brilliance. He'd never concentrated his efforts sufficiently to permanently improve his game since career and family entered his equations. Eldon hoped to make a living from the Game and never have to be a grub employee as were many semi-permanent novices.

"Bet you score gets a two minute run down on the Rec Network tonight," observed Samiv.

Eldon did too but feigned modesty with fair conviction. Samiv drifted on and was obviously going to be a bit weak in the morning. Eldon always took it easy even though the synthetic drugs and alcohol weren't that bad on the mind unless done in continual excess.

A monitor was waiting to hand him a message plug as looked up. Tomorrow's game already! Eldon inserted the plug in his ear and waited for it to security check his skull Ident implant. He made no notes, such things were sometimes lost or stolen, all fair game so long as no personal or property damage resulted. The plug was foolproof since it would only work for him and the organic code would soup if it got a wrong ident check.

Eldon's suspicions were confirmed. Eleven players in a limited resource, rapid development scenario. The player index average was one forty! That was an awfully large, high powered group for only third round. It was almost like a semi-final match last year. Most of the players were known to Eldon which meant the computer had tagged him as needing stiffer competition. He must actually have a chance of finishing with the first echelon players for the whole tournement! There had been talk that this year's Games would be the best in ten years and his next game line-up was an almost absolute confirmation.

As Eldon played through the message game specs again he also watched the recaps. An original field of 1300 had been cut to under 200 and only half those would

be left after the morrow's game. Second round ended qualifying for those without permanent ranking from last year. Of that 200 only fifty hadn't made second round cut last year. Eldon just missed it last time but was now one of the few remaining of almost a quarter million initial local entrants. Most weren't good but it was satisfying to know he'd make money this year and become something of a celevrity if he could survive two more games. That bothered him since the Game specs only gave him a 37% chance of making his 9% score for tomorrows match. He pocketed the plug for review later and rose to make his way to the Pleasure quarters which were superb even for New Lavegas. The turn of events warranted diffusing his thoughts for tonight of he'd be unable to function from anxiety. A bit of silly juice and some professionally boistrous companionship for the night would do the trick. "If it does good feel it," the saying went. Prudery and guilt of self had demised long before Eldon's birth.

---to be continued ---

A STELLAR CONQUEST STRATEGY

Those new to games like SC have a hard time of it until a few attempts are under their belts. Aside from that there are few society level games around. It's quite a change from the usual diet of historical wargamers. A winning strategy is more complex to plan and execute with a multiplicity of factors to balance. Most wargames are battlefield commander games limited to tactical movement and arrangement of military forces. Society level games require broader skills that consider economics, resources, population, and technology as well as military decisions. These wider skills mean winning can be achieved by a variety of methods that may be beyond the tactical genius though he's still a formidable foe.

It's risky for designers to suggest strategies. In this case it's sure to make my B- player status stick. The strategy suggested here has so far held its own in a variety of situations. It's conservative, suit ed for those who aren't yet SC champs capable of manipulating the game's fullest nuances. It will keep you in the game long enough to learn and have you in a position to be dangerous in the later going if other players take you for granted.

A good strategy uses your strengths and exploits opponents weaknesses while maintaining a flexibility of options. That may sound a bit Greek but it means you should select a developmental and military strategy suited to you and that allows for the abilities and actions of opponents. Each game should play a bit differently to avoid becoming predictable, hence vulnerable. The basic elements determining your strategy are limited intelligence, multiple factors, random exploration results, and opponents.

The game moves through three phases that do blend into each other. Exploration is first and should have the goal of locating Terran type planets for colonies. Put most of your population into one colony to serve as a strong base. But, don't make that colony close to opponents. You will need IIT almost immediately and should get 3MA to give added exploration and defensive mobility. Resources found in your quadrant pretty much dictate development. Two or more Terran planet colonies close together facilitate defense and mutual emigration of colonists from one to the other. A colonizable NM planet in conjunction with a Terran planet makes an excellent industrial base to exploit fairly early. Rember, an IU needs four years to pay for itself on a non-NM planet but only two production years on an NM planet. Build industry early and rapidly on non-NM planets or they won't have time to pay for themselves. The victory conditions are territorial but that doesn't mean you should spread all over the map. A single ship is sufficient to control a system for victory points at end game when it does count. Keep your population together in big enough colonies to be useable. You can never build Dreadnaughts if you don't have a colony with forty industrial units. Your early goal is to build as large an industrial base as possible to support the war phase that comes later. You may get wars as early as production year four or five so have some defenses to protect against the player who decides to conquer an industrial base. A player who goes to war early runs risks, but he can be a real danger. His early production went into warships so he won't have the industry for a sustained effort. He depends on taking your colonies and using their production to make his conquests good. He must come into your territory far from his base. Use this to your advantage. A small strike force can keep him off balance threatening his home planets. The early aggressor threatens moves deeper into your area so you must be prepared to defend. But, he can't know your strenght or boldness. An attack toward his home systems may be a full fleet or single Escort, he can't be sure. A counter threat delays his reinforcements as they hold to assess your strike. Since the early warrior won't get production from conquered colonies until the second production year of conquest delayed reinforcecments leave him open to your rebuilt fleet.

You'll always be torn between building industry or war material. You'll never be strong enough to meet all threats but your opponents aren't either so don't let it paralyze actions. Bluff and threaten to the maximum. Convince opponents your main strength is always against them. I wish there was better advice on how to handle the game as it moves through exploration, build-up, and war phases. There's no way through the confusing fog but playing good opponents to build skill and understanding.

About the only rule of thumb is a post mortem on what happened. If you lost territory by being in the wrong place at the wrong time or by being outmanned when you got there odds are you're being out smarted. If most of your victories come without much battle or seem to fall in your lap then you've got the edge. Despite what was said earlier about the strategic emphasis of SC's design tactics, in terms of bluff and psyching, are crucial determinants in specific battles. Being a master builder with the most industry doesn't save you from losing if you don't read threats early enough to meet them with sufficient force.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

*More pages next time
*A suprising turn in the 'tales of Tannish'
*Star Probe commentary and review
*A preview of THE YTHRI
*More SC variants and, a discussion of why Robotic IU's and Planet Force Screens AREN'T ultimate weapons.
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